

Christian Baptism

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[0 : 00] Well I'm sure that very very few of the audience envy my task tonight because this is a very controversial subject and an area of continuing debate and disagreement between members of the body of Christ. And because it is contentious I want to begin by making three general comments.

First of all I have little hope of convincing my Baptist friends on this issue. I don't despair of truth or of my Baptist friends' logical powers but history shows that this is a long-standing disagreement and all that can be said has been said I'm sure on both sides. I don't if I have anything fresh to offer that could commence those uncommenced by previous discussions on this subject.

Secondly I want to say that I don't regard this debate between Baptists and Pedro-Baptists as affecting fundamental doctrines. There is no doubt that in practice it is difficult to have the two points of view co-existing in one church or denomination. But that is a practical difficulty. The divergence itself is not one between Christians and non-Christians. It is very much an in-house and in family debate and division. It's one that divides C.H.

Bergen and John Kennedy. Men who on all fundamentals were agreed. The deity of Christ whose resurrection is vicarious atonement and so on and so on, the emphasis on God's sovereignty and salvation. On all these points his brethren agreed. And this particular difference is a minor one in comparison to those huge areas of the consensus. It is indeed a sad reflection of our failed humanity.

That those who are one in comparison to those who are one in comparison to those who are one in the other issues must stand apart on something minor such as baptism. But one must listen on to add that one is often conscious that there is profound agreement between us and the Reformed Baptists on all essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

[2 : 57] And I feel with them a kinship that I often don't feel with us and the issue of baptism. And the third comment I want to make is to shout across this divide at my Baptist brethren and sisters that neither I nor the Free Church is sacramentalist.

And our adherence to the doctrine of infant baptism does not mean that we believe that baptism itself by itself mechanical or invariably effects any saving change in the child.

We don't believe that the sacramentalist. We don't believe that the sacraments in and of themselves have any efficacy upon the un-regenerate soul and Baptist and so it doesn't in any way regenerate. Now it seems to me that there does persist the prejudice that those of us who are and that are all the Baptist believe that somehow there is some kind of manship in this particular right.

And I know that in some pedo-Baptist churches there is a practice of indiscriminate baptism and also the view that baptism by itself does effect some change in the child.

[4 : 43] I was very amused by a news item I heard yesterday on BBC Radio 4 in its coverage of the current Gulf tragedy. A comment in parenthesis that in Iraq all new babies were being christened Saddam.

And I wonder how Saddam has reacted to that particular comment. But it does indicate how far we have lost sight of what this baptism actually means.

Baptism does not christened Saddam does not christen or Christen or put somebody in Christ. Its logic as we see lies in a quite different area.

Well having made those three general comments I want now to move on to ask three questions. I want to ask what is the meaning of baptism and I want to ask what is the correct mode of baptism and I want to ask thirdly who are the subjects of baptism.

First of all then the meaning of baptism. What is the import of this particular ordinance? No ordinance it is that has been set up by Christ himself and is commanded all his people to submit to and undergo this form of initiation in a public way into his own body.

[6 : 17] The fundamental meaning of baptism is that it signifies our union with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is baptism in the name of Christ, baptism in or into the Lord Jesus Christ.

It signifies our being one with him and as such our participation spiritually in his crucifixion, in his burial and in his resurrection.

It signifies our covenant union, it signifies our covenant union with the Lord. It means that we participate in all that he has secured because we are one with him.

We are members of his body. We are members of his body. We were crucified with Christ. We rose with Christ. We live with Christ. We are built on Christ. We are rooted in Christ himself.

There is of course a corollary to that. But the Lord's own baptism represents his engrafting of himself into his people. His assumption of our responsibilities and liabilities.

[7 : 52] Conversely, our baptism indicates that we participate in all his inheritance. We have his rights. We have his privileges. We have his status.

All God's promises to him. All God's promises to him are promises to us who are in him because we are baptized in his name and into his name.

It follows from that, that all that flows from union with Christ is represented or signified in the sacrament of baptism.

Specifically, it means that we participate in remission of sin. The washing, the water signifying this washing away of the guilt of our transgression.

A reminder to us, our reminder to us, our reminder to us, our reminder to us that in Christ, we are clean. There is no condemnation. We have lost all our guilty stains. A baptism of repentance with a view to the remission of sins.

[9 : 06] And so flowing from union. And so flowing from union, there is first of all the washing away of our sins. Secondly, there is the renewal of our nature. The washing away of our corruption.

Baptism in this washing. Baptism in this respect, the labor of regeneration. Not because it itself regenerates. But because it is the symbol of this spiritual washing.

And thirdly, again, in union with Christ, it is the symbol of our participation in baptism by the Holy Spirit.

We are told that in Christ we are baptized into the one body. And the washing the baptism in water is the sign and the scene of this higher spiritual baptism.

A reminder, an attestation to us, of what we enjoy as members of the body of Christ. The Lord's own baptism, this was reinforced by the advent of the dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 31] Now that dove did not represent the Spirit's initial descent of Christ. Christ had the Spirit before His baptism.

But the baptism and the dove were attestations to the Lord of what had already taken place. And similarly, in our own baptism, there is an attestation to us of this fact.

That we have been baptized in and filled by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I may add that baptism is the sign and the pledge of our being in covenant with God.

Of our assumption and acceptance of Christ as our Lord. And our acceptance of ourselves as the servants, the slaves, the doulos, the douloi of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the confession that we are His. That we are His property. That we are His slaves. We are His pupils.

[11 : 44] That we are worshippers of Him. Who for us has come to be the living God. We bear His name. So fundamentally, baptism signifies our union with Christ.

We are baptized into Him. And flowing on from that incorporation in Christ.

Baptism signifies specifically the washing away of guilt. The washing away of corruption. The filling with the Spirit of God.

And the assumption of our own covenant obligations. And of course, when any believer is baptized, the sacrament is saying all of these things to Him.

The sacrament is giving Him the comfort and the encouragement. It's saying to Him, you are in Christ. Your sins are washed away.

[12 : 53] Your corruption is washed away. You are filled with the Spirit of God. And you have now assumed this burden of covenant obligation.

Secondly, we ask, what is the mode of baptism? How ought this right to be administered? Now, in the Presbyterian and Peter Baptist churches, the position is that the actual mode doesn't matter.

The most common practice is to baptize by sprinkling. Or we may baptize by pouring the water from some receptacle.

Or we may baptize by immersion. Our position is that either of these three modes is acceptable and is a valid administration of that particular ordinance.

And in given circumstances, the Church may be expedient to use either of these three methods.

[14 : 13] We may sprinkle, we may pour, or we may nurse, depending, as I say, on the circumstances.

However, our Baptist friends have taken a different position. And they have argued that immersion is the only proper mode.

Now, I use the word proper because it is fairly nonspecific. The position that is commonly taken by Baptists closest to us in theology is that baptism by any mode other than immersion is irregular, is unsatisfactory, but is not necessarily invalid.

Now, there are some Baptists who regard baptism by any mode other than immersion as invalid. That means that they would not only re-baptize those baptized by immersion and its system such re-baptism, but they would not allow inter-church membership, or if they were very logical, would not allow even to the Lord's table, those not baptized by immersion.

Now, I think it's fair to say that there is a measure of difference of opinion among evangelical Baptists on this particular issue.

[15 : 51] That's why some of us have been able to preach in Reformed Baptist churches, why some of us have sat at the Lord's table in Baptist churches, and why in some Baptist churches those baptized by means other than immersion are allowed to be members of the congregation with more or less qualification.

Now, these are only variants upon a theme. The theme is that the Bible itself lays down that baptism must be by immersion, that is the Baptist argument.

And that is based on certain affirmations which they make as to what the verb to baptize and the noun baptism actually mean in Greek.

And their argument is that the natural, normal, non-symbolic and unnecessary meaning of this word is to immerse, that to baptize is to immerse, and that baptism indicates immersion.

And therefore every instance of baptism in the New Testament is an instance of immersion. Now, we accept that sometimes it may mean that.

[17 : 09] We accept that immersion is a valid and regular mode of baptism. But we would also argue that there are instances in the Greek scriptures, of the Old and the New Testament, where the meaning to immerse or immersion is not acceptable in the light of the context.

Though I am not taking you into any detailed analysis of that evidence tonight, but I could maybe instance just two or three examples of what I have in mind.

For example, in Leviticus, where the Lord prescribes the ritual for the cleansing of a leper, He lays down that the priest should use two birds.

One of those birds should be slain and drained of its blood, and the living bird should then be baptized in the blood of the slain bird.

Now, it seems to me that it would be a very difficult exercise to immerse a living bird in the blood of another bird of the same species.

[18 : 21] It is possible to sprinkle a bird. It is possible even to dip the blood of the bird. But it is, I think, impossible to say that here to baptize means to immerse.

We have the example also of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel. Remember that because of his megalomania, he fell under the rebuke of God, and for a period, he became insane.

And during that time, he lived like a wild beast. He lived out in the wild and we are told that he was baptized in the Jew of Heaven. Now, it is very difficult to imagine that in that context, to baptize means that he was immersed in the Jew of Heaven.

That he was wet with the Jew of Heaven, that certainly would be true. But it is inconceivable that he was actually immersed in the Jew of Heaven.

We find again, we turn to the New Testament, that at least some of the examples of the use of to baptize and baptism, do not admit of the idea of immersion at all.

[19 : 45] For example, in the Gospel of Luke, in chapter 11, the Pharisees were told that verse 33 were astonished when they saw that the Lord did not wash before dinner.

Now, the verb to wash here is literally to be baptized. The Lord did not baptize himself before dinner. Now, there is no evidence that the Jews of this period insisted on immersion before a meal. And there is no evidence in the Old Testament of any right of this kind. It simply meant that before a meal, the Jew must wash his hands.

And that was controlled by very stringent rabbinical legislation as to just how far up the arm that washing had to go. But there was no insistence whatever that the Jew must actually immerse himself before dinner.

The Pharisees, Luke 11, 30 to 38, was astonished to see that he did not wash himself. That surely is perfectly adequate when he looked up and did so in this particular context.

[20 : 58] And again, in Hebrews 9, we find a similar reference, Hebrews 9, 10. There, what's happening is that the writer is discussing the Old Testament and the nature of its provisions.

And it tells us that under the Old Covenant, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper.

But deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

Diverse washings, I think, is the rendering of the Authorised Version. There is ablutions in the RSV which I have before me for the moment.

Now underlying that, of course, is the Greek that speaks of diverse baptisms. Now, it is, I think, factually correct to say that there were in the Old Testament Mosaic provisions under the law.

[22 : 07] There were no prescriptions with regard to immersion which would qualify for this particular description. What diverse washings or diverse immersions could this refer to?

In actual fact, the Old Testament made much emphasis on sprinkling, the sprinkling of blood, for example, but very, very seldom was there any insistence on washings and even less on immersions.

So it seems to me that it is really impossible to sustain the argument that baptism must be by immersion. It seems to me that the symbolism is safeguarded if we use the element of water which sprinkled upon the individual is itself an appropriate reminder of the washing away of guilt, of the washing away of corruption, of the outpouring of God's Spirit, the symbolism as far as I am concerned is safeguarded by the element itself, not necessarily by the manner of its application. We may be sprinkled, we may be sprinkled, we may have a Spirit poured upon us, we may even be drenched in the Spirit, to use the language of 1 Corinthians 12, but I cannot see any necessary insistence on this fact of immersion.

Now I know that in Romans 6, the symbolism of union with Christ is discussed by the Apostle in terms of our going down into the water.

[24 : 06] And Baptists are very confident that that symbolism is only safeguarded by the right of immersion, where we go down into the water.

Well the difficulty with it is that baptism is also a symbol of burial. And it would be difficult I think to carry the symbolism of immersion quite as far as that.

And also of course in the same context in Romans 6, there is a different symbolism where we are planted together in the likeness of his death.

Now my point is that going down into the water is an adequate symbol of the Lord going down into death. It is not an adequate symbol of burial, or more precisely of entombment, because the Lord wasn't buried, he was entombed.

And it is no symbol in my judgment of being planted in the likeness of his death. Now I am at the slightest diminishing the validity of the Baptist mode of baptism.

[25 : 24] I respect immersion. I respect immersion. I respect that particular mode. But I am asking that there be a place for our mode too.

I am saying that our mode too is valid. But there is no stress in the New Testament on the way that it is done.

There is a stress on the element, there is a stress on the symbolism, but there is no stress on the mood.

Any more than in regard to the Lord's Supper, there is any stress on the fact, of which we are sure historically that the bread used was unleavened bread.

We know for a fact that that's what was used. But the word in the narrative for bread is the ordinary word for bread. And most Christians are happy to use ordinary bread for this particular purpose.

[26 : 31] And so in baptism we use water. The method of its application is not, as far as I can judge, important. Thirdly the question of the subjects of baptism.

Who ought to be baptized? Now what's instinctive answer to that is that those who are converted and those who are believers, that they should be baptized.

And in that sense we believe in believers' baptism. And of course that point needs no demonstration.

It's plain enough in the New Testament that adults were baptized on professional faith. But the reformed confessions have gone beyond that.

And they have said that we may also baptize the infants of parents, one or both of whom is a believer.

[27 : 43] The question is, do believing parents have the right to have their faith in Christ registered in an act of baptism, which includes not only themselves, but their families.

They sit tenable on sound scriptural principles to argue that in the New Testament baptism should be organic.

The baptism is not only the baptism of baptism, but also that in expression of his faith, he brings his whole household under the rubric of baptism.

Now it seems to me that the basic argument used by Peter Baptists on this particular issue is still valid.

And it is this. It is the fact that at the inauguration of the covenant of grace, in the case of Abraham, God laid down that the sign of the spiritual covenant should be administered to the physical seat.

[29 : 18] Now there are two separate points there.

There is the emphasis first of all that the sign, in Abraham's case circumcision, was a sign of a spiritual covenant.

That is a sign of a covenant which held forth spiritual promises. Now it is sometimes argued that what was promised to Abraham was not the spiritual promise, but was the land of Canaan.

It is argued more broadly that what was promised in that Abrahamic covenant was worldly prosperity, political privilege, economic privilege.

Now historically, apart from theologically, if circumcision was assigned to Abraham of the land of Canaan, we would have to say with, I hope, necessary humility, that Abraham never received what God promised him.

[30 : 51] Because Canaan was never his. It became his descendants' land only 400 years afterwards.

It seems to me also that nobody with the slightest knowledge of the history of the Jewish people could ever undertake to argue that they have been in any sense the favorites of Providence. Under the whole heaven that hath not been done as has been done to Jerusalem. Even to this very moment they are the most hated nation on earth, surviving only under the umbrella of Western military strength.

It doesn't seem to me tenable to argue that circumcision was a sign either of Canaan or of a covenant of material and temporal prosperity.

In fact, the terms of the Abrahamic covenant make it very, very plain that it was understood by Abraham himself in spiritual terms.

[32 : 17] The core promise was, I shall be your God and you shall be my people. I shall be God to you and to your seed after you.

That was a promise. That was a promise. Our circumcision was a sign of that promise. A promise which embraced not only Abraham but his seed.

And a promise which said not at all, I will give you this land. But a promise which said, I will be God for you. And I will be God for your seed.

How did Abraham take it while Hebrews tells us that in the light of God's promise he looked for a city that had foundations.

Whose builder and maker was God. The promise was so phrased and so formulated that he did not look simply for an earthly city.

[33 : 22] Or an earthly kingdom. But he looked for one which was eternal in the heavens. And if we come down again to the Paul in discussion in Galatians.

Paul tells us this. That we ourselves as Christians are in fact beneficiaries under that precise Abrahamic covenant.

We are the ones who have experienced the real fruition of its terms and of its promises. Christ, in what is I suppose the greatest single statement with regard to the arrangement of the New Testament.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. Being made a curse for us. Why? That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through faith.

The blessing promised to Abraham came upon the Gentiles through faith in Christ. And what was that blessing? That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

[34 : 34] Now it seems to me that we are still under this Abrahamic covenant. This was a spiritual covenant. If it was Canaan, then Abraham never enjoyed it.

If it was Canaan, then Abraham didn't so understand it. To him it meant a city eternal in the heavens. A city with foundations whose builder and maker was God.

To Paul it meant the covenant of which we as Christians are heirs, of which we are beneficiaries. We receive the blessing promised to Abraham.

Namely, we receive the promise of the Spirit himself. It was a spiritual covenant. It was God's commitment to him and to his seed.

It was the promise of an eternal city of God. It was the promise of redemption from the curse that sin brought into paradise.

[35 : 39] It was the promise of the Spirit of God. And when those apostles, when they saw the New Testament inheritance and falling before their eyes, they said, this is what God promised Abraham.

That Abrahamic covenant was very often in their thoughts. When the Lord himself said, Go ye therefore, my disciples of all the nations, of all the Gentiles.

There too is the same echo. God's promise to Abraham, In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. And then God sent the church to all the nations.

To bring to all the nations the blessing promised to them in Abraham. So, it is a spiritual covenant. And yet the sign was to be administered to the physical seed.

God did not say, put that sign on the spiritual seed. Put that circumcision, the sign of righteousness, the sign of justification.

[36 : 45] Put it on the physical seed. Of those born within the family of Israel. Naturally and physically.

That's why not only Jacob but Esau is circumcised. You see, it is so moral, so important.

It is not the elect who receive the sign. It's not the born again who receive the sign. It is the physical seed.

That is the view you see circulating within the reformed community, within maybe their own circles. But very much in Dutch reformed circles.

That baptism itself. That physical links with the covenant. They themselves mean that our children are inevitably saved.

[37 : 44] Well, you see that's a comfort that I can't in God's extent to God's people at all. Because Esau is there, you see.

Esau is there reminding us. That not all the baptized are elect. That not all the baptized are born again. That not all the baptized are saved.

That the mere fact of descent from covenant children, from covenant parents, is itself no guarantee of someone's salvation.

The sovereignty of God. The imperative necessity of the new birth. Is present at the point of circumcision.

At the point of baptism. And God who knew that Esau was not elect, said circumcision.

[38 : 45] God who knew that that man would never be born again, said circumcision. God who knew that that man would never participate in the inheritance.

That he would not be his God. That he would never know the blessing. Still God said, put the sign on him. Because the sign by God's ordinance was administered to the physical seed.

And at that very point the seed must be conscious. That even there God is sovereign. That God is not committed by his own ordinance. That the circumcised may not be heirs.

And that the circumcised may never be born again. And yet God says, put the sign of the physical, of the spiritual covenant. Put it on the physical seed.

Now you see these people were not to be baptized. So that they would become covenant children. It was not the sign that put them in a special relationship.

[39 : 55] They were in the special relationship before the sign. And the sign is predominant because of the special relationship. We have to say you see.

That the children of our Baptist friends are as much covenant children as our children. The fact of their not being baptized does not mean that they are not covenant children.

It means only that the sign of the covenant is not put on them. It is because the children of Abraham were within the covenant that the sign is put upon them.

Not that they become covenant children because of the sign itself. The sign is the attestation of their special bond with the children of God.

The man. The man, they believe the man, the penitent man, the penitent mother, the converted mother. The benz to the mother. Want the sign of the covenant by the grace of God. And not only upon himself, but upon his family.

[41 : 05] not because that sign is going to put his family in a different relationship with God but because being his children they are already in a special relationship to the covenant of God they are not elect and yet they are in a special relationship with the covenant of God the sign was a sign of covenant blessing it is the attestation of the benefits that go with this privilege of being linked physically, organically to the means of grace to the people of God, to the prayers of the people of God what does baptism do to the infant? I say little, nothing I would say what's it a sign of?

it's a sign that is going to be taught that is going to be prayed for that the church of God is going to nourish and cherish of course she can have all these things without the sign but God said put the sign on them the sign of the oracles of God the sign of the promises of God the sign of the worship of God put that sign on the child the child has those things but put the sign on as well so the principle is the sign of the spiritual covenant administered to the physical seed now the question is under the New Testament have things changed?

is there a different arrangement? well let me underline what we'll be committing ourselves to we would be saying I suggest that in this particular instance there is an impoverishment as we move from the Old Testament to the New because in the Old Testament the parents had the privilege of knowing that God said and to thy seed God said put the sign on thy seed too because I will show mercy for thousands of generations to those that love me I will show loving kindness I will show yesed I will show covenant loyalty so in the Old Testament God said take your children too and put the sign on the child the sign that God's promised God's offered God's blessing is to them put the sign of that on your child as well because your child is special but now you tell me in the New Testament that's been revoked that's been withdrawn and now God says not on the child now just on yourselves now the child is no longer a part of it

I can't myself easily accept that that there is this impoverishment because the logic of the movement from Old Testament to New Testament and every other phase is that as we come to the New the New is better I expect the position of the child to be better under the New Testament than it was under the Old not worse I expect that God's promise at least remains to the child as well in the New Testament as in the Old Testament then I check that against certain facts and I find two outstandingly important things find first of all that the covenant is the same the Abrahamic covenant the Christian covenant now of course different phase of its administration a new covenant as distinct from the Sinaitic covenant and yet the means of justification that is faith and the mercy of God the great promises remain the same we are Abraham's seed of course our insight is deeper of course we have the fullness of God's spirit of course we live in the light of a completed revelation revelation of course we have a worldwide church not simply a national church significant even magnificent improvements yes the New Testament is better it is a new covenant and yet it is a new form of administration of the primary covenant given to Abraham significantly modified in its operation under the law under the Mosaic economy but now declared to us in great purity and clarity in the New Testament that we remain under that blessing of Abraham we remain Abraham's seed we remain beneficiaries under the Abrahamic covenant you tell me you say ah but the New Testament is so much more glorious its term so much more magnificent really I will be God for you that means God is saying to Abraham I will be for you I will exist for you I will exercise my Godness for you I will be committed to you I will be your God now there is no way that you can improve on that and God made that promise not on legalistic conditions leaving us the obligation to earn the relationship but God made it really in terms of grace God's own pledge and promise I will be God for you there is no more glorious promise than that in Romans in Hebrews in Revelation the gospel of

[47 : 46] John in the upper room there is no more glorious promise anywhere for you than those words I will be God for you these words have never never never been excelled these words of Abrahamic covenant the covenant is not superseded the covenant is the same and again the church is the same it's a remarkable thing that when Christ came he did not inaugurate or institute a new church but he grafted the Gentiles into the old Abrahamic stock we are the new Israel we are the Israel of God the seed of Abraham the children of Abraham we are the wild branches grafted in to the original olive tree it's a magnificent symbol God did not plant a separate

New Testament church or a separate Gentile church that's why when the spirit when the gospel came to those Samaritans you see now chapter 8 they were not brought to perfection until the apostles came from Jerusalem and then in fellowship with the church of Jerusalem they received baptism in the spirit of God because there must be no new stock no new planting but an engrafting of wild branches into the original olive tree the same church well if it's the same covenant if it's the same church it seems reasonable to assume that the glorious and comforting provision that God made that when a man comes to faith he may embrace his children with himself under the sign of that covenant that provision does not seem to have been revoked and there is no imaginable objection to the doctrine of infant baptism that cannot also be adduced against infant circumcision the principle was laid down at the foundation of that covenant put the sign of the spiritual covenant put it on the physical seat will remain under that same covenant will remain in the same church and all the evidence we have in fact points towards the continuation of that arrangement now obviously you'll all be conscious that

I'm omitting many of the common arguments on household baptisms suffer little children are children sanctified by one believing parent and so on these to me frankly are not arguments for infant baptism they are confirmations they agree with my general thesis that the general arrangements of the Abrahamic covenant remain in place but they're collateral and they're peripheral to the issue here the issue here is whether in the New Testament the children of believers have a special relationship with the covenant as their Old Testament counterparts had and whether in the light of that we should or should not put the sign of that special relationship on them now when God gave us the covenant of grace God said the promises to your children too and God said put the sign of the promise on them as well now why do I baptize children is it because I believe that the infants of all believing parents are elect no is it because I believe that the infants of all believing parents will one day be born again no is it because I believe that one day they will all accept God for themselves no it's because God gave me an ordinance put the sign of the spiritual covenant on the physical seat and in the very first case of his administration almost God put Ishmael and God put Esau there to remind us that we were not to do this because theologically we knew how the thing worked but we were to do it because God said it in the case of Ishmael it seemed not to work in the case of Esau it seemed not to work but it wasn't related to that rationale to that explanation it was done it is done because God so said put the sign of my promise not only on yourselves but also on your children now there's a question that we face of course that is a more one more relevant narrative ourselves as

Scottish Presbyterians and free church people and church of Scotland people the question if we say then that we give this to the infants of believers then what do we mean by believers what parents qualify for this particular privilege now it will prevent a good deal of confusion if we remember two facts but infant baptism is given on the basis of the qualifications of the parent not the qualifications of the child it is given to the parent and it is the parent's relationship with God that is the determining factor this infant is not necessarily elect this infant is not born again but this parent who comes this parent receives it because he is in a special relationship with God the second principle is this that we would not give the sacrament baptism to a man for his infant or for his child unless we would give it to him for himself let me be more specific

[54 : 47] I must ask if a parent comes and asks that his infant be baptized the real question I'm asking is this if this man came as an adult wanting to be baptized himself would I baptize him would I baptize him if I cannot baptize his infant if I am not prepared to baptize him on what grounds can I baptize him I can baptize him and I confine myself to confessional theology I can baptize him if he is a member of the visible church that is if he professes the true faith I can baptize him if he is a believer that is confessionally if he receives Christ alone for salvation receives and rests upon

Christ alone for salvation faith is knowledge faith is conviction faith is commitment faith is trust is this man a believer now there is no way that any minister or curcession has any access to the

heart of a human being we are only admitting people on the basis of their visible qualities and I don't believe that that fence should be drawn too high I do not believe that we should require proof that someone is born again but who require to be satisfied that there is a credible profession of faith in Christ that the person himself is saying

I do have faith and his profession to have faith is borne out by convictions consistent with that fact by a lifestyle consistent with that fact and by a relationship with the church consistent with that fact to me the question should we give a sacrament only to communicant members is theologically an irrelevance it depends there are many factors that determine whether or not in our tradition folk become communicant members but theologically it is undisputable that infant baptism is for believers it is for the infants of believers believers the church's remit and responsibility is to ask whether the applicant is making a credible profession of being a believer of having faith in Christ now go back to the meaning of baptism it signifies union with Christ within that it signifies the washing away of guilt the washing away of corruption the baptism of the Holy Spirit and a pledge of commitment to God is this parent standing before me does he understand that he is professing to be in union with Christ to have his guilt washed away his corruption washed away to have had the Holy Spirit poured out upon him and to be making a pledge of covenant commitment to God and if he so understands what he is doing is his profession of union with

Christ a credible one is borne out by what we see of this man's life and conduct now I don't say that we must probe minutely and inquisitorially but we must begin to say to people do you think that as an adult you yourself qualify for baptism do you understand that you profess in baptism to be united with Christ and you profess that your lifestyle is consistent with the profession of union with Christ if we go to the Old Testament the general principle is that the sacraments were the privilege of covenant keepers now within covenant keeping there might sometimes be a great deal of spiritual mediocrity but there was no circumcision and there was no

[60 : 24] Passover for the covenant breaker the covenant breaker was cut off from the people in the same way in the New Testament church there is no infant baptism for the covenant breaker repudiator there is no Lord's supper for the covenant breaker baptism and the Lord's supper are for those who claim to be keeping God's covenant after all this is the sign of God's covenant I shall be your God you will be my people the applicant is saying I am one of God's people he is my God I am one of his people now I shall leave it there if you want to raise questions I shall do my best to deal with them who would like to ask the first question well perhaps I will although

I hope for just a little bit of time to formulate it it's it's it's it's not a question that you haven't answered at all Professor MacLeod in what you've already said but I wondered if you would just elaborate a little bit more and a bit more specifically it's about the way in which the sacrament is a means of grace and how you I just wonder if you can give any word of advice that you would give to Christian parents receiving the sacrament for their children how they should view the sacrament as a means of grace as they take the sacrament for their children and then the second part would be how who we who are Christian are Christian parents how do we encourage our baptized children to see the sacrament as a means of grace

I would have asked a question I'm not sure if it's a fair question but you'll soon tell me if it's not well I can't know because it wouldn't be fair it's a very complicated question because it raises complex issues but my view is that infant baptism is a means of grace to the parents and not to the children it's not a permanent and indelible mark on the body it is not part of the child's recollection and I come back again to the point that the primary participant and beneficiary is the believing parent and the means of grace factor is that at the point of baptism he has his own cleansing and washing and rebirth and spirit baptism attested in this divinely ordained way and he has the assurance given to him that his children too are embraced by

God's special covenant provision and so I would want to focus a large amount of the blessing the means the grace factor at the point of the baptism itself and I would want to focus it very much on the parent as the intelligent and conscious participant it would come back again to the same question as what benefit the child got from circumcision the answer to that is that circumcision is not itself the benefit but it was the sign of benefits and baptism again is not itself the benefit or even the means of conveying the benefit but it was a sign of benefits already enjoyed and what the child has in fact is an organic link with a Christian family an organic link with the church of God therefore he's going to be taught he's going to be prayed for going to be counseled going to be watched over now while I said that he might not be elect he might never be born again he might

never come to accept Christ for himself it would also have to be said that the Bible regards it as a utterly unnatural thing if a circumcised person repudiated the God of the covenant and time and again that point is made in the Old Testament that God's people went a whoring after other gods they have sought out broken cisterns that hold no water and God saw it as unnatural if the circumcised went after other gods in the same way while baptism is not a sign of election or a guarantee of regeneration it is yet the attestation of such privileges that if this child repudiates [66 : 11] God and Christ at the point of his own adulthood then he is doing something that is unnatural and I would want just to suggest as far as I can again that it is not what baptism is it is what baptism is the sign of it is what lies behind it that is important now in some ways that is the access into the other parts of Mr.

Mackay's question the role of parents and of the church as well to the parent at this point baptism is not itself something which imposes new obligations it is the sign of pre-existing of prior obligations that they must give this child not simply normal human parental attention but they must also provide for its spiritual needs that obligation does not rise from baptism baptism rises from the obligation and in the same way the church is a party to baptism in baptism although I didn't develop this because I've only one lecture to deal with it all the church itself is accepting the baptized person and the baptized child and family into its own membership baptism and it is not that baptism that makes the person a member of the church or puts the church under obligation to that person but the person is baptized because he is a member of the church because she is a member of the church and the church's obligations not because of the baptism the baptism is a reminder and attestation of prior obligations so I think I'm moving away

I hope not too shifterly from the notion of means of grace here it is not so much at the point of infant baptism a means of conferring grace to the infant although it does obviously encourage the parent but as far as the infant goes it is a sign of prior privileges and the sign for the church and the parents of prior obligations and what I've got to resist you see is the attempt to build infant baptism on an understanding of how it is a means of grace because I'm asking in what sense was it a means of grace to Esau and I'm really trying to stay behind this position that we baptize infants not because we understand how it works but because God told us to do it and I say again baptism does not confer the privileges it doesn't confer the obligations but it is the sign of privilege and the sign of the obligations yes you pointed out the similarities very helpfully between circumcision and baptism obviously circumcision was confined to the male sex and yet baptism was males and females would you like to clarify well I think it arises probably from the nature of the two covenants the one being anticipated the one being retrospective the fact that the

Old Testament sign is one which affects the male only is I think bounded very much with the promise of the seed that was to come and that's why this particular rite was used because the sacrament pointed to the coming Messiah Abraham's seed and I think that with the advent of the Messiah that need was dispensed with and the emphasis shifted to the completed work of Christ that is part of the answer but it is an issue for the Bible itself so I can't say this is the Bible's answer to your question but that is so I would assume we should look for an answer just ask the example I've experienced this the situation of someone who is now a believer an adult who is now a believer that yet was to use what society called christened as a child but now does not believe their parents were converted their parents were not believers when they went through

I wouldn't call that true but that wasn't a believer's child what would their position be would you feel they should be baptized as a believer again well in general the confessional position on this has been that we ought not to re-baptize because the sacrament doesn't depend for its validity upon the kind of man who administers in other words if it was done by some scandalous minister that doesn't invalidate the sacrament or if the parents at that point weren't converted that again was deemed not to invalidate the sacrament the sacrament was deemed to depend substantially on the use of the element of water and the invocation of the triune name of Father Son and Holy Spirit and those two factors were present along with the intention of baptizing was deemed to be a valid sacrament it seems to me that there is room for discussion on this issue and that if some people felt unhappy about their first baptism

[72 : 19] I'd be prepared to look at what problems it causes for them and take it from there but I will be in conflict then with classical protestant theology on this particular issue the reformers were virtually indeed all of them baptized by the Roman Catholic Church by priests of dubious pedigree and yet none of them ever felt inclined or led to question the baptism because they stressed the

objective factors the name in particular the triune name of God has been the most important thing it is however curiously true that Protestants would not accept baptism that was the ministry of the baptism by a nurse in a hospital because our clericalism came in here and it was insisted I think as a rule that it had to be quote a clergyman who did it and a nurse was not deemed to be a clergy person

I'm not sure I'm consistent that particular approach was John just two short questions one was could you define for us please what you mean by covenant of grace my understanding for what it's worth is that the covenant of grace was made between God the Father and God the Son in time past it's a short question but certainly not a small issue I'm not quite sure what the relationship between circumcision and the Old Testament and baptism and the New Testament should be but if there is a relationship I would think it would relate to life itself in other words as someone was born physically into Abraham's family they were circumcised and so I would think that as someone is born spiritually into God's family they should be baptised but

I'm not sure exactly what the relationship between circumcision and baptism should be I'd be grateful if you could clarify my understanding I'm reluctant to speculate on that relationship to me the one thing that matters is that they are both the signs of initiation into the covenant and baptism in that sense replaces circumcision but how they relate to one another I know that some Protestant theologians have very clever theories on this particular issue but my concern is simply to say that the one replaces the other and I don't want to go very far beyond that they are both signs of the covenant and baptism replaces circumcision as a covenant sign in the New Testament with regard to the covenant of grace my position is that that covenant is not the one made between God and the Son the Father and the Son between God and Christ but it is one made between God and the believer and when I discussed the covenant months ago or years ago

I suppose it is now here I had a threefold analysis and the first one was the covenant of redemption which is the one between God the Father and God the Son and I don't think you can have a coherent covenant theology without having that eternal pact between Father and Son it is a very old fashioned view but in my view it is a necessary position to take and in the covenant of grace we have a commitment of God to the believer at the point of the inauguration of the Abrahamic covenant Abraham is not a type of Christ he is the father of the faithful and it is as a believer in time space history that God makes this covenant with him and although it costs some of my colleagues it seems to me that there is no covenant of grace between me and God until my faith now he gives me that faith but from that point on we are bonded in covenant he committed to me and I committed to him and at that point

I think that the covenant sign is appropriately placed upon this new believer now the whole point of the Abrahamic arrangement was that the sign was not put on at the point of origin of spiritual life it was put on at the point of origin of physical life although the covenant was itself a spiritual covenant circumcision was a sign of justification of righteousness and yet God said put it on Esau who as an infant was not righteous and who as a non-elect person would never be righteous and yet God said put the sign of justification put it on Esau yes Mrs. McCadden if one is praying for an unbelieving conscious child how far can one call upon the covenant and remind

[78 : 01] God of the covenant in one's prayers for that unbelieving perhaps adult child well I find myself unable to say that we should pray with confidence that this child is a covenant child in the sense that God has elected him and God is bound to regenerate him but I think that we have the right to go to God and say Lord your promises over this child that you will be God to him and we have been faithful in bringing him up or her up with the knowledge and admonition of the Lord and we plead with God on the basis of his promise on the basis of our old covenant fidelity and yet with the humble submission that God is not bound and I can't get away from this that there is no absolute commitment on God's part to save our children even sometimes when we have been faithful parents

I think that there is the divine sovereignty is still present there so Lord we can say you made this promise to be God to my seed you asked me to be a faithful covenant parent I've tried to be that it would be unnatural for this child to reject the God of its fathers and at the same point the submission and it may be sometimes that the absence of that submission may itself be offensive to God if we claim as an absolute right that God owes us this I think that at that point we may be in fact giving offense to God by your lack of submission but of course I would love to be able to say yes that covenant children are going to be saved one day but I cannot really find in the scriptures a

foundation for such a confidence with reference to the two sacraments are there any differences in the requirements and obligations of those who receive them well without being exactly sure what question is behind this one or what question may follow from my answer to this one my instinctive answer is that there is no difference that both sacraments according to our confessional standards represent signify and seal exactly the same blessings and those blessings summarized as Christ and the benefits of the new covenant and therefore theologically they have the same qualifications the idea that baptism represents a lower level of blessing than does the Lord's Supper is biblically and confessionally quite untenable baptism represents washing away of guilt of corruption spirit baptism you can't get more than that and William Cunningham our outstanding free church theologian said that each sacrament represents the whole redemptive blessing both a change of status and a change of nature so I cannot see any room for difference in what they signify and therefore no difference in the qualification requisite to them David and perhaps one more if there is one more David it's over to have to learn I remember the position of confessional theology that at least one of the parents should be a believer before their children are baptized then neither would I like to make too close an identity between member of the visible church and believer but nevertheless it seems to me that we as a church have gone beyond the position of confessional theology here in our application of infant baptism in your view is this a good thing or a bad policy both now and for the future well anything which is a violation of the truth is bound to be long-term deleterious to the church and detrimental to its interests and so

I take the view that it would be bound to be a bad thing what has happened is that we imported from North America into the north of Scotland the idea of a halfway covenant and that was done on pragmatic grounds that if you did not baptize them you would lose them and I think that such pragmatism does have disastrous consequences because it is radically unfaithful to God himself but historically it should be borne in mind that in the highlands where this practice prevailed the standards for baptism then were as high as those in the south were for the Lord's Supper so the position is not historically all that simple and I think it could be argued that in the south admission to the table was too easy and in the north it was too difficult and the truth lay somewhere in between you see

I find this constant problem that in the highlands there is a distinctive Scottish evangelicalism quite distinct from the south in all its aspects different origin different distinctness different emphasis altogether how that happened is a complex and interesting story but what we find I think is we have had to allow adherence much more say in the life of the church than they would ordinarily have and that is bound to be a bad thing but the answer would not be to limit infant baptism to those currently deemed qualified for the Lord's table because our practice in that area too is in my judgment unbiblically inquisitorial and the truth would lie I think somewhere in between without offending distinguished members of the audience what happened in Scotland was that in the north we imported the independent view of church membership into the north of

[85 : 07] Scotland very similar to the North America and New England situation where to become a member you had to give a narrative of conversion and that acquired a fairly articulate faith and you were then grilled and if you weren't good you were thrown out by the tenants and then by the highly ministers as well now that was not the practice in Pasbitidian polity traditionally and I think that would have to modify our approach to both sacraments to give admission to the table on the basis of a credible profession of faith and admission to baptism on exactly the same basis but in the north the habit arose of turning away from the table any of his conversion you had doubts and that to me was not a wholesome or a biblical practice Professor what advice would you give to an adult who had been baptized as a child of

Christmas and then wanted to undergo the English baptism and then present the right well I would as a rule discourage it because it would then be a baptism based on subjective criteria that they did not feel good about the first baptism and if their first baptism were regular and competent I would encourage them to believe that there was no guilt accruing to them from any inadequacy with regard to it but if it became a serious spiritual problem to them I would then discuss it with them and with colleagues I think because it is a very difficult issue for some people baptised with unconverted parents and converted ministers and so on and it can cause difficulties so I am simply saying that I would in some situations discuss with them what to do but I would instinctively discourage free baptism

I should point out that in the audience there is a very distinguished Baptist present who has been very quiet all night to my great comfort and consolation Dr.

David Kingdon who in fact is Britain's most articulate Baptist and wrote a book on the subject called Children of Abraham and his silence is a model of restrained Christian courtesy and I thank you for that well as always we want to thank Professor MacLeod for his help to us and although he introduced the subject as one of complexity and difficulty it certainly didn't hinder him from dealing with it with his usual lucidity and we thank him for that I just want to make the usual intimation and after I have done that I wonder if it would be not unkind to ask Dr.

Kingdon to conclude our meeting in prayer although I don't know you personally but I'm very glad to have you with us the intimations that are usual are these that the next lecture will deal with the other sacrament under the title the holy supper and that will be God willing on February the 8th there's the usual collection plate at the door for those who want to help with the defraying of the costs of these lectures there is as always on sale afterwards books and tapes and tapes of the lectures at the back of the hall and a new service for this lecture and that is that there will be a cup of tea available afterwards for those who would like that I found it very interesting to notice that there is a much greater proportion of free church folks here tonight than is usual I first of all thought that that was because of the subject for tonight but I just wonder now if perhaps they smelt the tea now let's stand for prayer our God and Father we bless thy great and holy name that we meet together as one in the

[89 : 57] Lord Jesus Christ has united upon the fundamentals of the gospel we thank thee for our common membership by grace in the body of Christ we thank thee too that there is a tie that binds us together together and that is the bond of love and we pray our father that where we have conscientiously to differ from one another as brothers and sisters in Christ nonetheless that we may value and esteem each other because of our common allegiance to thee and to thy dear son we give you thanks our father for the ministry of thy servant and we pray that as we meditate upon what we have received we may continue to know the illumination of your

Holy Spirit and now we ask that it may please you to take us to our homes and loved ones in safety and we pray our father for the many anxious hearts who are disturbed because of how of the good people to Rocket people